

BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0510  
RON GRUNBERG/LONDON

APRIL 5, 1976

FOCUS: JAMES CALLAGHAN

ANNCR:

BRITAIN'S NEW PRIME MINISTER, JAMES CALLAGHAN, HAS MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE IN ALL THE MAJOR POLICY AREAS -- ECONOMICS, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY -- AND IS KNOWN FOR HIS POLITICAL WIT. HIS REPUTATION PROMISES CONTINUITY. RON GRUNBERG HAS A PROFILE FROM LONDON.

VOICE:

AFTER WORLD WAR TWO, JAMES CALLAGHAN BECAME A LABOR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT. OBSERVERS CAN RECALL ONLY TWO TIMES SINCE WHEN MR. CALLAGHAN DEFIED HIS PARTY WHIPS AND VOTED AGAINST LABOUR IN PARLIAMENT.

HE IS A PRAGMATIC RATHER THAN AN IDEOLOGICAL POLITICIAN. LIKE CHURCHILL, HE WAS NEVER GRADUATED FROM A UNIVERSITY AND IS NOT CONSIDERED AN INTELLECTUAL. BUT HIS POLITICAL ABILITY CONTRIBUTED TO HIS APPOINTMENTS TO THE GOVERNMENT'S TOP THREE MINISTERIAL POSTS SHORT OF PRIME MINISTER -- CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, HOME SECRETARY AND FOREIGN SECRETARY.

AS CHANCELLOR IN THE MID-SIXTIES, MR. CALLAGHAN IS NOW REMEMBERED AS THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT DEVALUE THE BRITISH POUND STERLING. FOR THREE YEARS HE REFUSED AND FROM NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN, WHEN IT WAS FINALLY DONE BY THE PRIME MINISTER, HAROLD WILSON, UNTIL NOW, MR. CALLAGHAN'S INTRANSIGENCE HAS BEEN CONSIDERED A MISTAKE BY MOST OBSERVERS.

THEN THE HOME OFFICE. HE IS ASSOCIATED WITH TWO MAJOR POLICIES. ON NORTHERN IRELAND, HE WAS THE RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL FOR THE PROVINCE WHEN THE SECTARIAN VIOLENCE GREW HEAVY, AND HE COULD NOT STOP IT. NO ONE REALLY BLAMES HIM FOR THAT -- IN THE SEVEN YEARS SINCE, NO ONE HAS YET PUT FORTH A SOLUTION. MR. CALLAGHAN IS SOMETIMES CRITICIZED FOR BACKING THE HEAVY BRITISH TROOP PRESENCE IN ULSTER, WHICH SOME NOW SAY MADE IMPOSSIBLE FROM THE START ANY PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH THE CATHOLIC EXTREMISTS. THE OTHER POLICY WAS ON IMMIGRATION OF EAST AFRICANS. MR. CALLAGHAN IS BLAMED FOR BRIEFLY SUPPORTING POLICY WHICH IN EFFECT WAS DISCRIMINATORY.

THE LAST TWO YEARS MR. CALLAGHAN HAS SERVED AS FOREIGN SECRETARY. GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND HIS APPARENT GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH AMERICAN SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER, HAVE BEEN STRESSED. HE WAS UNABLE TO BRING ABOUT AN AGREEMENT TO END THE FIGHTING AFTER THE FIRST TURKISH INVASION ON CYPRUS IN THE SUMMER OF SEVENTY-FOUR, BUT, HERE AGAIN, IT IS SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE COULD ACCOMPLISH, EITHER. HIS GREATEST PERSONAL TRIUMPH MAY HAVE BEEN WHEN HE WON THE RELEASE OF BRITISH AUTHOR DENIS HILLS WHO WAS IMPRISONED IN UGANDA FOR WRITING A BOOK CRITICAL OF THE REGIME OF IDI AMIN. MR. CALLAGHAN FLEW DOWN TO KAMPALA AND FLEW BACK OUT WITH MR. HILLS. AS FOREIGN SECRETARY, JAMES CALLAGHAN CAMPAIGNED STRONGLY FOR BRITAIN'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMON MARKET.

MR. CALLAGHAN'S GREATEST SKILL, THE OBSERVERS SAY, IS POLITICAL. THEY SPEAK WITH AWE ABOUT THE POLITICAL SUPPORT HE HAS BUILT UP IN HIS LOCAL CONSTITUENCY IN CARDIFF, WALES. ABOUT HOW HE HAS WON SUPPORT FROM THE TRADES UNIONS, WITH

WHICH HE HAS ALWAYS HAD A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP, AMONG A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY OF THE LABOUR PARTY, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, AMONG THE PEOPLE AT LARGE. OPINION SURVEYS HAVE SHOWN MR. CALLAGHAN TO ENJOY MORE SUPPORT AMONG THE PUBLIC THAN ANY OTHER OF THE CANDIDATES FOR PARTY LEADERSHIP. IT WAS SAID THAT HAD THE LEFT-WING, IN THE NAME OF CANDIDATE MICHAEL FOOT, WON THE PRIZE OF TEN DOWNING STREET, THE COUNTRY WOULD HAVE WANTED GENERAL ELECTIONS SOONER. THAT COULD HAVE DISRUPTED SENSITIVE ECONOMIC NEGOTIATIONS IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. BUT NOW THAT MR. CALLAGHAN IS PRIME MINISTER WITH NO PRESSURES TO GO TO THE PEOPLE SOON, HE WILL HAVE TO USE HIS POLITICAL ACUMEN IN DEALING WITH THE LEFT. MICHAEL FOOT DID SO WELL IN THE CONTEST FOR PARTY LEADER THAT TO IGNORE THE POWER AND NUMBER OF THE LEFT WOULD BE PROVOKE OPEN SPLITS IN THE PARTY WHICH THE CAREFUL ATTEMPTS AT ECONOMIC RECOVERY COULD ILL AFFORD.

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